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34 - MONTPELLIER

Téléph. : 72.29.44 Poste 637 (Fac. des Sciences)


Prof. Joshua Lederberg
Stanford Medical Center
Stanford University
Palo Alto, Calif. USA

Dear Josh,

I was looking forward so much to the possibility that I might see you this spring during a trip I had planned to the States and to California. But spring has gone by and I still haven't been able to get away ! Since the last time we saw each other three years ago, I have never managed to get back to the U.S. If, finally, I am able to leave I hope so much to be able to see you. To have been out of contact these years, is for me something I regretted very much. I still keep the hope that you might one day even visit us in Montpellier.

To day I am writing to tell you about the plans of Springer Verlag (Heidelberg) to create a new journal covering the field of molecular evolution and to be called the Journal of Molecular Evolution. The hope is that the first issue can appear early next year. I wonder what you think about the founding of still another journal. In the present case it seems to me it is a timely undertaking.

The areas that the journal thus far plans to cover are :

- 1) biogenetic evolution (prebiotic molecules and their interaction) ;
 - 2) evolution of informational macromolecules (primary through quaternary structure) ;
 - 3) evolution of genetic control mechanisms ;
 - 4) evolution of enzyme systems and of their products ;
 - 5) evolution of macromolecular complexes (chromosomes, mitochondria, membranes, etc.) ;
 - 6) evolutionary aspects of molecular population genetics.
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I am not writing this in a purely disinterested way... In fact, I am, very selfishly, turning towards you as a friend, to ask you whether you think you might help me with the journal.

I say "help me" because, foolishly or not, I have just accepted the function of being editor in chief. Springer Verlag's idea in having an editor-in-chief, was explained to me as being that it is advantageous for a journal (so their past publishing experience seems to have taught them) to have some one who centralizes all papers after refereeing and coordinates and harmonizes policy. Besides the chief editor, five editors are foreseen, plus an editorial board. The task of the editors is supposed to be to participate in the policy making of the journal, to receive manuscripts, send them to referees of their choice, and finally forward them with the referee's and their comments to the editor-in-chief. The main activity of the editorial board is to act as referees.

members of

I am writing, Josh, to ask you if you could possibly accept to be one of the editors of the forthcoming periodical. There will be three editors in the States : Ponnampetuma, Jack King of Santa Barbara, and if I am extremely lucky, you. There will be one in Germany, Braunitzer. I shall act as editor in France. It is conceivable that later on an editor will be sought in Great Britain.

I feel, Josh, that your opinion about the scientific policy of the journal, as well as your opinion about individual papers - especially the controversial ones, that look interesting and doubtful at the same time, would be for the journal of paramount importance. I feel that if you accepted to be an editor, the journal could look with considerably more confidence at its own future than it could otherwise, and stand a better chance to achieve the high standards that will justify its existence.

If you are frightened by the extra load of work that accepting to be editor entails - as I am frightened myself - I might pledge to make this load as light as possible by trying to channel towards you mainly those issues that are important for the journal, and spare you routine activities.

Could I possibly ask you to let me know your decision pretty soon ? The announcement of the journal and of its editors and editorial board have been held up by one or two vicissitudes stemming from differences of point of view in

the initial stages of its creation, and that has put things seriously behind schedule. The publishers hoped to be able to formally announce the journal and its staff by later this month. The reason I am writing you only to-day is that I ~~lock~~ up ~~my~~ present function with the journal only very recently. Along with this letter I am enclosing a list of the members of the editorial board - that is those that have thus far accepted.

Hoping that I may see you soon, and with
Jane's and my warmest wishes,

Very sincerely



Emile Zuckerkandl

P.S. I am thinking of inviting Woese into the editorial board.
I imagine that you agree with this.